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RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 1434
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 5227
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SUBJECT: SEOUL - PRESS BULLETIN; October 29, 2009

TOP HEADLINES

Chosun Ilbo, Dong-a Ilbo
Main Opposition DP Beats Ruling GNP in By-Elections by Winning
Three of Five Contested Seats

JoongAng Ilbo, Hankook Ilbo, Hankyoreh Shinmun, Segye Ilbo, Seoul
Shinmun
GNP Suffers Crushing Defeat in Seoul Metropolitan Area and
Chungcheong Province

DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

12 ROK students who were studying in the U.S. have halted their
study and returned home, because the owner of the boarding house
where they stayed was arrested on Oct. 22 by local police for
allegedly beating one of the students in his care. (JoongAng)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Special Envoy for the Six-Party Talks Sung Kim and Ri Gun, Director
General of American Affairs at North Korea's Foreign Ministry,
exchanged views about regional security, including the North Korean
nuclear issue, at the Northeast Asia Cooperative Dialogue in San
Diego, but they had no formal contacts for direct U.S.-North Korea
talks. (Hankook)

A huge car bomb tore through a busy market in northwestern Pakistan
on Oct. 28, killing nearly 100 people. The blast came just three
hours after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrived in the
country for talks. (All)

In Afghanistan on the same day, Taliban gunmen attacked a guest
house used by UN staff, killing 12 people including six UN
employees. (All)

MEDIA ANALYSIS

- N. Korea

Moderate Hankook Ilbo carried an inside-page report from Washington that Special Envoy for the Six-Party Talks Sung Kim and Ri Gun, Director General of American Affairs at North Korea's Foreign Ministry, exchanged views about regional security, including the North Korean nuclear issue, at the Oct. 26-27 Northeast Asia Cooperative Dialogue in San Diego but that they had no formal contacts for direct U.S.-North Korea talks.

The report quoted sources as predicting at least one or two more contacts between the U.S. and North Korea, since Director Ri will stay in New York for six days to attend another security forum organized by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) and the Korea Society.

- Aid for Afghanistan

Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo carried a commentary headed, "Is the ROK Ready to Get Bogged Down in Afghanistan?" It said: "It is almost meaningless to draw a distinction between combatants and non-combatants in the current Afghan situation. There is no safety zone. ... The U.S. has yet to decide how to lead the Afghan war in the future. ... In this situation, there is no reason for us to make a decision to redeploy troops to the war-torn country. It will not be too late to wait until the Nov. 7 presidential runoff election in Afghanistan and the U.S. reaches a final decision."

SEOUL 00001723 002 OF 004

- Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan

All newspapers led their international news section with reports on Oct. 28 terrorist attacks on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border. According to media reports, the brutal bomb attack in Pakistan came just three hours after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrived in the country for talks.

Conservative Chosun Ilbo wrote in the headline: "All-out Counterattacks in Pakistan, Afghanistan... October Marks Deadliest Month for U.S. Military." Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo's headline read: "Taliban Attack UN Guest House to Obstruct Next Month's Presidential Run-off Election"

OPINIONS/EDITORIALS

OBAMA AND THE KOREA-US FTA
(Dong-a Ilbo, October 29, 2009, page 38)

By Editorial writer Bang Hyung-nam

President Barack Obama has made several comments on the Korea-U.S. free trade agreement this year. At a bilateral summit in April, he said, "I understand that ROK President Lee Myung-bak has made a lot of efforts to pursue the Korea-U.S. FTA. I have a strong will to pursue the FTA." In receiving credentials from ROK Ambassador to the U.S. Han Duck-soo, Obama said that "an FTA with Korea, our seventh-largest trading partner, will boost prosperity for the people of the two nations." The Joint Vision for the ROK-U.S. Alliance, a statement released by both leaders in June (following the June 16 Summit in Washington), also says, "We will continue to deepen our strong bilateral economic, trade and investment relations." It goes on to say that "based on the recognition that the agreement will further strengthen such relations, we'll work together to plan our way to go for the future." (Editor's Note: The final sentence above actually reads "We recognize that the Korea-U.S. (KORUS) Free Trade Agreement could further strengthen these ties, and we are committed to working together to chart a way forward."

If Obama's comments were not an empty promise, the ratification of the deal might have proceeded more smoothly. Yet little progress

has been made 28 months after the accord was signed. In an opinion piece Tuesday, the Wall Street Journal said Obama has done nothing to get the agreement ratified. His administration's stance is in stark contrast to that of the ROK Government, which presented the deal to the National Assembly for ratification long ago.

Americans favor ratification of the free trade deal. When the U.S. Trade Representative conducted a survey of 288 American businesses in July, 92 percent said they back ratification. They urged Washington to promptly ratify the pact, saying it will contribute to U.S. economic growth and improve bilateral relations in security and diplomacy. Nevertheless, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative Wendy Cutler is pinning hopes on renegotiation due to fears in the auto sector. Delaying the deal's ratification because of one certain industry is not right.

Obama will arrive in Seoul Nov. 18 for a two-day visit. What suggestions he will make is attracting interest. Over the short term, Korea will announce a plan to send troops to Afghanistan to protect reconstruction teams to contribute to world peace, strengthen its alliance with the U.S., and mark Obama's first visit to Korea. His predecessor President George W. Bush said, "The Korea-U.S. FTA will further cement political ties between the U.S. and Korea." It is a high time for Obama to speak from his heart.

IS THE ROK READY TO GET BOGGED DOWN IN AFGHANISTAN?
(JoongAng Ilbo, October 29, 2009, page 47: Excerpts)

SEOUL 00001723 003 OF 004

By Editorial writer Bae Myung-bok

Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan told the National Assembly It seems that the ROKG has finally decided to redeploy troops to Afghanistan. The ROKG plans to increase the number of Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) personnel to 130 from the current 25 and send a 300 to 500 person-strong guard force to protect them. The ROKG apparently wants to emphasize its position that it will send non-combatant forces only for self-defense, not combatant forces.

What the ROKG claims is half right and half wrong. Even if non-combatant forces are deployed, they cannot but serve as combatants when embroiled in a battle. It is almost meaningless to draw a distinction between combatants and non-combatants in the current Afghan situation. There is no safety zone. This situation is fundamentally different from when the Zaytun unit was deployed to carry out civil affairs operation in a secure area of Iraq and returned safely. German troops in Afghanistan are a good example indicating what could happen if we send our troops.

Germany deployed its troops to Afghanistan mainly to protect the PRTs. However, things began to turn different. They often engaged in a battle to counter attacks from the Taliban which expanded its presence to northern Afghanistan. So far, 56 German soldiers have been killed.

It is understandable why the ROKG decided to redeploy troops to Afghanistan despite the lingering nightmare of the hostage incident.

It is likely that the ROKG viewed it as an urgent task to enhance its national status by making contributions to the world as a host of the next G20 Summit. The U.S. anticipates assistance to Afghanistan from the ROK even if it has not made a direct request. The ROK apparently calculated that it can make further contributions to Afghanistan and have the desired effect by deciding to expand the number of PRT personnel and send hundreds of troops to protect them.

The ROKG also wanted to demonstrate that it has made its own decision on troop redeployment ahead of President Obama's visit to the ROK.

However, it is hard to avoid an argument that this decision has been made too hastily. The U.S. has yet to decide how to lead the Afghan war in the future. The goal of the Afghanistan war is unclear. It is likely that shortly after the 9.11 terrorist attack, the U.S. aimed to overthrow the Taliban regime which provided a shelter to Islam terrorist al-Qaida. When this goal was realized, the U.S.

focused on establishing a stable and democratic government in Afghanistan. In the meantime, al-Qaida hid out in the border area of Pakistan and the Taliban intensified its resistance against foreign forces.

In this situation, there is no reason for us to make a decision to redeploy troops to the war-torn country. It will not be too late to wait until the Nov. 7 presidential runoff election in Afghanistan and the U.S. reaches a final decision.

In order to redeploy troops to Afghanistan, we should be ready to get bogged down there. It is hard to image that only the ROK would get out of Afghanistan before the war is over because it would breach international trust. We cannot rule out the possibility that any casualties inflicted would lead to additional troop deployment. In spite of this, if the ROK has decided to redeploy troops, it should candidly explain all risks involved to people and seek their understanding. The ROKG should bear in mind that if the ROKG tries to gloss over this situation with an expression of "non-combatants", it could face harsher consequences later.

WORRYING TALK OF OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT OF USFK
(Dong-a Ilbo, October 29, 2009, Page 38)

By Political Affairs Reporter Yoon Sang-ho

In June, 2008, after a meeting with Minister of National Defense Lee Sang-hee, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said during a press

SEOUL 00001723 004 OF 004

conference at Collier Field House in Yongsan Garrison, "No decision has been made, nor will one be made soon, (about sending the Apaches.)" The statement was designed as a response to a Dong-a Ilbo article two weeks earlier which said that the USFK battalion of Apache attack helicopters would be deployed to the Middle East region. Most media outlets quoted Secretary Gates' statement, downplaying the possibility of an Apache battalion being sent to Afghanistan.

Five months later, however, the ROK and the U.S. announced that the Apache battalion would be deployed off the peninsula. The two nations initially decided to replace Apache helicopters with the A-10 anti-tank aircraft but later said that F-16 fighter jets would replace Apache helicopters, creating confusion. Controversy ensued over whether F-16s would be able to fill a possible security vacuum left by the withdrawal of the Apache battalion.

Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen recently sparked controversy by saying that the U.S. is considering sending some USFK troops to the Middle East. The Ministry of National Defense explained on October 27, "According to the USFK on October 27, Adm. Mullen said that his response to USFK servicemen was not an official one, and the USFK troop level will remain at the current level."

However, observers inside and outside the military view Adm. Mullen's remark as a message saying that the U.S. will earnestly implement the USFK's "strategic flexibility," under which USFK troops will be deployed to other troubled parts of the world. This atmosphere was felt a year ago, too, when Gen. Burwell Bell held his last press conference as the USFK commander. While saying, "The U.S. will maintain troop levels in the ROK," Gen. Bell emphasized, however, that (the U.S.) should be guaranteed to deploy its military power to ensure victory in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Some observers predict that around the year 2012, when the wartime operational control of ROK troops is transferred to the ROK, and the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command is dissolved, there will be U.S. troop cuts in the ROK. In other words, when the ROK military takes the leadership in defending the nation, the U.S. will withdraw U.S. ground troops from the ROK or redeploy them to Afghanistan. This speculation is bolstered by the fact that Adm. Mullen described the OPCON transfer as a "significant change" while mentioning the possibility of sending some USFK troops to the Middle East.

In the past, whenever there was talk of reducing the number of USFK

troops or pulling them out of the peninsula, the U.S. first denied it, saying, "We have no such plan for the time being or at present," but in the end, the U.S. put its original plan into action. Based on these precedents, the ROKG should figure out the true intention of Washington more thoroughly and fully brace for any impact that Washington's intention may have on security on the Korean Peninsula.

For the ROK-U.S combined forces to maintain deterrence against North Korea is directly linked with our security.

STEPHENS